

# Poet Shuns Johnsons' Culture Season, Says U.S. Policy Lacks Rhyme, Reason

"We poets are (upon a poet's word)  
Of all mankind the creatures most absurd;  
The season when to come, and when to go,  
To sing, or cease to sing, we never know."

—Horace.

By Laurence Stern

Washington Post Staff Writer

A storm blew up on Parnassus yesterday over the Johnson Administration's foreign policy.

Until then the White House had weathered the slings and arrows of dissent from the coffee house, the campus and the faculty lounge.

Yesterday, officials confirmed that Pulitzer Prize winning poet Robert Lowell had turned down an invitation to a

"White House Festival of the American Arts" on June 14.

Lowell wrote the President of his "dismay and distrust" at the Administration's foreign policy. "We are in danger," protested the poet, "of imperceptibly becoming an explosive and suddenly chauvinistic nation, and we may even be drifting on our way toward the last nuclear ruin."

No sooner had Lowell's letter reached the White House than another bolt was fired from New York's literary heights—a telegram from 20 fully certified eminences of arts and letters, including six other Pulitzer Prize winners.

"We who have considered ourselves friends of the Administration support Robert Lowell in his decision . . ."

they wired the President.

"Though he has spoken only for himself, we should like you to know that others of us share his dismay at recent American foreign policy decisions.

"We hope that people in this and in other countries will not conclude that a White House arts program testifies to approval of Administration policy by members of the artistic community. To the contrary, as the weeks pass some of us have become more and more alarmed by the stance in foreign affairs which seems increasingly belligerent and militaristic."

Among the signers were Pulitzer poetry winners John Berryman, Alan Dugan, Stan-

See POET, A21, Col. 6

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A 21

POET—From Page A1.

## Poet Shuns Johnson's Cultural Season

ley Kunitz, Louis Simpson, W. D. Snodgrass and Robert Penn Warren. There were also novelists (Mary McCarthy, Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth, William Styron) and painters (Mark Rothko, Larry Rivers, Philip Guston) and one caustic cartoonist, Jules Feiffer.

Lowell, whose New England lineage includes poet-essayist-diplomat James Russell Lowell and poetess Amy Lowell wrote that he greatly admired the President's domestic policies but that he views present U.S. foreign policy "with the greatest dismay and distrust."

There was another rumble from Parnassus last week in a speech by former Librarian of Congress and poet Archibald MacLeish. The world, he said, saw the bombing of North Viet-Nam and occupation of Santo Domingo as

"exercise of power" and the revival of "the old, bad days of gunboat diplomacy."

And on May 19 Lewis Mumford, cultural historian and president of the National Academy of Arts and Letters, provoked a squall within the cultural Establishment by accusing the Administration of conducting cold-blooded blackmail and calculated violence in Viet-Nam.

The Mumford attack prompted painter Thomas Hart Benton of stalk out of the session and then resign from the Academy with a salvo of his own.

"These matters, in time of world crisis . . . are not debatable in the highly colored language of an emotional fanatic, which is the language Lewis Mumford used before

the Academy," protested Benton.

During last year's campaign, the New York *culturalati*, including many of this year's dissenters, turned out in large numbers for an LBJ fundraising dinner.

Special White House assistant Eric Goldman, who is helping to organize the arts festival, said yesterday that Lowell's was the only refusal that had been received. Novelists Saul Bellow and John Hersey have agreed to come and read from their works, although both said in public statements Wednesday that they were troubled at Administration policies abroad.

Hersey said that instead of declining, he thought he could make a stronger point by reading, in the President's presence, from a work of his entitled, "Hiroshima."